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ART IN ITS RELATIONS TO AMERICAN LIFE.

FAIRFIELD, Ct., July 11, 1855.

DEAR CRAYON:—Just fixed here in summer quarters, and refreshed by country air and salt-water from city weariness, I remember your kind request for an occasional contribution to your columns, and sit down to write you a gossipy letter that may do to mingle with your graver philosophical and critical articles in this pleasant summer time of easy writing and reading. Is there not something quite kindred between your profession and ours? Certainly, every artist ought to have a deep religious sensibility, or he is blind to the most exalted source of beauty; and every preacher ought to have something of an artist's taste and imagination in his composition, or he is sadly deficient alike in the material and the working out of his thoughts. The two professions have been and will be vastly helped by closer intimacy; and, although no Fra Angelico may rise up in this country to unite the both callings in his own saintly Art, our America will be far fairer and stronger, if her artists are men of professed reverence, students of the Infinite Loveliness—and if her preachers are lovers of the Beautiful, not inapt at painting glowing word-pictures to frame into their arguments for the Divine Wisdom and Love. Sure it is, that we, as a profession, are very fond of the society of artists; and, if I may judge from my own personal friends, your journal has no heartier well-wishers than the educated clergymen of this country. You have taken your stand upon ground wholly unequivocal, and THE CRAYON is committed to the doctrine that genuine beauty is the natural expression of the true and good, or, in other words, that pure Art is the rightful form of philosophy and religion. Instead, then, of limiting himself to the technicalities of pigments and marbles, the genuine artist claims for his vocation an equal place among the liberal professions—and, from his own point of view, he has his word to say and his work to do, as well as the theologian, the jurist, and the statesman, for the good of man and the kingdom of God.

I do not wish to be caught poaching in my neighbors' fields, and, therefore, instead of trying to be wise beyond my knowledge in any specialities of artistic criticism, I will content myself with writing a few words upon the relation of the beautiful Arts to the popular sentiment of America. It is evident that, as a nation, we are not enthusiasts for painting or sculpture. Whatever patronage may be bestowed upon our prominent artists by a few men of fortune and taste, our people at large have not yet begun to pay their debt of honor to the genius that has done so much towards refining the intellect and immortalizing the history of the nation. Yet we must not wonder at this, for it would be a very strange thing for a people so engrossed with material interests, so busy of necessity with the task of subduing a continent to order, fertility, and comfort, to pause from their work to indulge a taste that has never been cultivated in the contemplation of master-pieces that they have never seen. We do not believe, that we, Americans, are constitutionally indifferent to Art. Nay, quite the contrary; for, in proportion to

our opportunities, no nation on earth exhibits a quicker sense of the Beautiful. We have given to the age more than our proportion of painters or sculptors; and, whenever a work of Art has been presented to our people, which has appealed to their own national sentiment, or sterling humanity, there has been no want of fervent and intelligent enthusiasm. It is unreasonable to expect our countrymen to feel like Italians for Italian Art, to shout or weep over a Madonna or St. Cecilia, like the crowd of devotees who look upon the painting of the saint's face as the presence of the saint's intercession. Nor can we be expected to admire the court scenes or battle-pieces of France or England, as if they answered to our own home affections, and their heroes were household words with us. We are shaping our own form of domestic and national life in much strength, which, in the end, must bloom out into not a little beauty.

Is it not true that the American is remarkably eager to beautify whatever he really values, and are not our great utilities in their finish and splendor, omens of the advent of the beautiful Arts? I can never look upon a brave ship spreading her sails or bracing her wheels for her career over the sea, without seeing, in her union of strength and beauty in her build and finish, a promise of the good time coming, when the force and delicacy of the American mind shall have worked themselves out into the expression with such means as wealth, leisure, and culture may hereafter afford. Instead of being jealous of the progress of such utilities, the artist should wish well to it, not doubting that the useful, if allowed free scope, will be sure to ally itself with the Beautiful, as its necessary ornament and solace. Let us be willing, that our people should begin to cultivate their taste in their own providential school, and be encouraged with the many proofs before us, that our daily life is bordering more and more on the domain of the Beautiful Arts, and catching sight and sound of the scenes and melodies there. All that educates the eye and ear, or refines the affections, or stirs the imagination, must needs prepare the way for the appreciation of Art. With this conviction, must we not take very cheering views of the future of America under such influences of domestic refinement, intellectual and religious education? The simple fact that more people than ever in any nation before, are now engaged in this country in choosing, laying out and adorning a home to themselves, with such hints as they can get from books or landscape-gardeners, speaks volumes for the growth of rural and architectural taste. Our countrymen, too, are a generation of travellers; and every boy and girl of a moderately prosperous family must see Trenton and Niagara, West Point and Mount Washington. The eye for landscape painting is, by this constant intercourse with Nature, quite quick in Americans; and this form of Art is, perhaps, more highly appreciated than any other among us.

The love of Nature that connects itself so closely with the home life of our people, and which is fast transforming the rural vicinity of our great cities into gardens, is showing itself in another form alike connected with the domestic affections. Our countrymen are giving the dead a tribute

of remembrance beyond the standard of the Egyptian pyramids or Roman Catholic crypts. In every considerable town in America, the burial-place is likely to be the most beautiful, alike from natural position and artificial embellishment. There is nothing of the kind on this earth that equals the great rural cemeteries of our chief cities; and many an unpretending village has provided a burial-place for its dead, that need not be ashamed to be named with Greenwood and Mount Auburn, in respect to beauty, however modest in size and pretension. Undoubtedly, many mistakes have been made in arranging and adorning our cemeteries, especially through our characteristic national trait of trying to do very great things on a small scale, and to copy in miniature the architectural wonders of the old world. But, the most severe critic will not deny that our rural cemeteries have had an admirable influence on our public taste and sentiment, and are among the most encouraging signs of the growth of love for the Beautiful in Nature and Art.

The same genial spirit that surrounds the graves of the departed with emblems of affection and hope, reveals itself in a more generous and ideal social life. Our free schools and fraternal churches are developing new forms of sociality which have many æsthetic aspects, and bringing young and old into new relations with each other, and with the works of God. Every village has yearly one or more rural festivals under the auspices of the church or school, in which large numbers of the people, fathers, mothers, youths, maidens, farmer, mechanic, doctor, lawyer, minister, all meet in some grove by hill-side or river-bank, and with innocent pastime, sometimes with song and dance, and always with entire sobriety, spend the cheerful hours in pleasures that leave cherished memories, without a single pang. These excursions are capable of fine artistic effects, from proper choice of the ground and arrangement of the festival. To some overworked men and women, these are the chief relaxation of the year; and to not a few of the poor children of our cities, they are the first revelation of green fields and flowing waters. Let us be true to the genius of our civilization, and such genial associations will increase, until, in heaven's own time, Art and Nature shall join hands in the consecration of our common life.

We Americans are somewhat delicate in our nervous organization, and not without some peculiar adaptation to the beautiful scenery in which our lot has been cast. We shall never know our priceless heritage until the eye of true Art teaches us to interpret the loveliness of Nature. In my summer sojourns in this sweet village, I have been constantly impressed with the beauty of the scenery that is waiting to surprise me in every new walk and ride. A few days ago I brought from New York a Claude Mirror, which has helped much to reveal the picturesque features of the landscapes. I have been pleased to observe how much a few of our villagers have been struck with a glance at their own streets and houses in this picturesque reflector of nature. Our postmaster, who is something of a wag with not a little of the *nil admirari* in his composition, broke out into a good hearty exclamation of delight as he

saw the picture of the broad green, and winding lane, and arching trees around his store; more pleased probably with this new view of familiar things than with any far-off novelty. He saw that for a score of years without thinking of it, he had been dealing out letters and papers before an ever-changing picture of God's own painting. Yesterday I rode with a social and intelligent friend through the old town of Stratford, and we were charmed with the number of exquisite views that rose to meet us on the way, and in the village. We stopped near the old Episcopal church; the oldest, we believe, in this State, the edifice dating 125 years ago, and looked at the scene in our mirror. The broad street shaded with stately elms and flanked by substantial houses, chiefly of the ancient English style, stretched itself afar, until its receding line so diversified with footpaths and carriage paths, lost itself upon the blue surface of Long Island Sound, that presented its refreshing waters in the distance. It was a charming sight, and my friend, who had acquaintances in the village, offered the glass to two with whom he had been chatting—the one a sea captain, the other a deacon of immaculate Puritan creed. The captain vented his admiration in the true nautical style, which did not astonish us. But as to the deacon, we had doubts of him, for there are some strait-laced bigots who think it wicked to love nature, as if the Creator were to be glorified by contempt for his works. But the good man, in his own more subdued way, quite came up to the old salt's enthusiasm, and made us by his right feeling resolve that we would never say anything against Connecticut deacons again.

Accept this rambling letter if it will serve you, and hope for something better the next time. Believe me, dear CRAYON,

With love for things lovely,

Yours ever,

SAMUEL OSGOOD.

MODERN PAINTING ON GLASS.

OF all the various principles of Art which, in modern days, we have defied or forgotten, none are more indisputable and few of more practical importance than this, which I shall have occasion again and again to allege in support of many future deductions: "All Art, working with given materials, must propose to itself the objects which, with those materials, are most perfectly attainable; and becomes illegitimate and debased if it proposed to itself any other objects, better attainable with other materials." Thus, great slenderness, lightness, or intricacy of structure—as in ramifications of trees, detached folds of drapery, or wreaths of hair—is easily and perfectly expressible in metal work or in painting, but only with great difficulty and imperfectly expressible in sculpture. All sculpture, therefore, which professes as its chief end the expression of such characters, is debased; and if the suggestion of them be accidentally required of it, that suggestion is only to be given to an extent compatible with perfect ease of execution in the given material, not to the utmost possible extent. For instance: some of the most delightful drawings of our own water-color painter, Hunt, have been of birds' nests; of which, in painting, it is perfectly possible to represent the intricate, fibrous or mossy structure; therefore, the effort is a legitimate one, and the Art is well employed. But, to carve a bird's nest out of marble would be phy-

sically impossible, and to reach any approximate expression of its structure would require prolonged and intolerable labor. Therefore, all sculpture which set itself to carving bird's nests as an end, or which, if a bird's nest were required of it, carved it to the utmost possible point of realization, would be debased. Nothing but the general form, and as much of the fibrous structure as could be with perfect ease represented, ought to be attempted at all. But, more than this. The workman has not done his duty, and is not working on safe principles, unless he even so far honors the materials with which he is working as to set himself to bring out their beauty, and to recommend and exalt, as far as he can, their peculiar qualities. If he is working in marble, he should insist upon and exhibit its transparency and solidity; if in iron, its strength and tenacity; if in gold, its ductility; and he will invariably find the material grateful, and that his work is all the nobler for being eulogistic of the substance of which it is made. But, of all the Arts, the working of glass is that in which we ought to keep these principles most vigorously in mind. For we owe it so much, and the possession of it is so great a blessing, that all our work in it should be completely and forcibly expressive of the peculiar characters which give it so vast a value. These are two, namely, its ductility when heated, and transparency when cold, both nearly perfect. In its employment for vessels, we ought always to exhibit its ductility, and in its employment for windows, its transparency. All work in glass is bad which does not, with loud voice, proclaim one or other of these great qualities. Consequently *all cut glass* is barbarous: for the cutting conceals its ductility, and confuses it with the crystal. Also, all very neat, finished, and perfect form in glass is barbarous: for this fails in proclaiming another of its great virtues; namely, the ease with which its light substance can be moulded, or blown into any form, so long as perfect accuracy be not required. In metal, which, even when heated enough to be thoroughly malleable, retains yet such weight and consistency, as render it susceptible of the finest handling, and retention of the most delicate form, great precision of workmanship is admissible; but in glass, which, when once softened, must be blown or moulded, not hammered, and which is liable to lose, by contraction or subsidence, the fineness of the forms given to it, no delicate outlines are to be attempted, but only such fantastic and fickle grace as the mind of the workman can conceive and execute on the instant. The more wild, extravagant, and grotesque in their gracefulness the forms are, the better. No material is so adapted for giving full play to the imagination, but it must not be wrought with refinement or painfulness, still less with costliness. For, as in gratitude, we are to proclaim its virtues, so, in all honesty, we are to confess its imperfections; and while we triumphantly set forth its transparency, we are also frankly to admit its fragility, and therefore not waste so much time upon it, nor put any real Art into it when intended for daily use. No workman ought ever to spend more than an hour in the making of a glass vessel. Next in the case of windows, the points which we have to insist upon are; the transparency of the glass, and its susceptibility of the most brilliant colors; and, therefore, the attempt to turn painted windows into pretty pictures, is one of the most gross and ridiculous barbarisms of this preeminently barbarous century. It originated, I suppose, with the Germans, who seem, for the present, distinguished among European nations by the loss of the sense of color; but it appears of late to have considerable chance of establishing itself in England: and it is a two-edged error, striking in two directions; first, at the healthy appreciation of painting, and then at the healthy

appreciation of glass. Color, ground with oil, and laid on a solid opaque ground, furnishes to the human hand the most exquisite means of expression which the human sight and invention can find, or require. By its two opposite qualities, each naturally and easily attainable, of transparency in shadow, and opacity in light; it complies with the conditions of Nature; and by its perfect governableness, it permits the utmost possible fullness and subtlety in the harmonies of color, as well as the utmost perfection in the drawing. Glass, considered as a material for a picture, is exactly as bad as oil is good. It sets out by reversing the conditions of Nature, by making the lights transparent, and the shadows opaque; and the ungovernableness of its color (changing in the furnace), and its violence (being always on a high key, because produced by actual light), render it so disadvantageous in every way, that the result of working in it for pictorial effect would infallibly be the destruction of all the appreciation of the noble qualities of pictorial color. In the second place, this modern barbarism destroys the true appreciation of the qualities of glass. It denies, and endeavors as far as possible to conceal, the transparency, which is not only its great virtue in a merely utilitarian point of view, but its great spiritual character; the character by which, in church architecture, it becomes most touchingly impressive, as typical of the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the heart of man; a typical expression, rendered specific and intense by the purity and brilliancy of its sevenfold hues; and therefore in endeavoring to turn the window into a picture, we at once lose the sanctity and power of the noble material, and apply it to an end which it is utterly impossible it should ever worthily attain. The true perfection of a painted window is to be serene, intense, brilliant, like flaming jewelry; full of easily legible and quaint subjects, and exquisitely subtle, yet simple in its harmonies. In a word, this perfection has been consummated in the designs, never to be surpassed, if ever again to be approached by human art, of the French windows of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.—*Stones of Venice*.

WILLIAM COLLINS.—William Collins was born in London in the year 1788. He was the son of a man whose profession, as "man of letters and dealer in pictures," influenced him in becoming a painter. He began to draw while quite a child, taking for his studies whatever natural objects came in his way, "even a group of old blacking bottles, picturesquely arranged by his friend Linnell." At the age of sixteen he had made studies from the sea, and had taken lessons in painting from the celebrated Morland. There is no incident in the life of Collins, except that which belongs to an even tenor of existence. He lived near London, studied at the Royal Academy, and when opportunities offered, made various excursions to procure studies from nature. He visited, in the course of his life, France, Italy, Holland, &c., and made sundry tours to Scotland, Wales, and other parts of England. He enjoyed the full blessing of health until a few years before his death, and painted almost to the verge of the grave, dying of a disease of the heart in 1847, in the fifty-ninth year of his age.

Collins is one of the bright ornaments of the English school; his walk was not in the region of "high art," but it embraced some of those delightful phases of Nature which his taste and fidelity made peculiarly attractive.

THE present day is full of anomalies. A new apartment in the Vatican is hung with tapestry presented to the Pope by the Sultan. What a concatenation!—*Athenaeum*.

WE are glad to see the Committee of the Architectural Museum offering prizes for wood-carving and stone-carving.—*Athenaeum*.